
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address: **1505 9th Street NW**
Landmark/District: **Shaw Historic District**
ANC: **6E**

Meeting Date: **May 30, 2013**
H.P.A. Number: **#13-274**
Staff Reviewer: **Brendan Meyer**

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The applicant, owner 1505 9th Street NW LLC, seeks concept approval for a new four-story, three-unit residential building at 1505 9th Street NW which is a vacant lot in the Shaw Historic District. Plans were prepared by Workshop T10 Design Studio.



Figure 1. Proposal for 1505 9th Street NW

Property Description and Context

The property is a narrow vacant lot only 13'-4" wide. The historic building stock on this block consists mostly of small scale residential development spanning several eras. Styles, materials and rowhouse types are substantially varied and include flat front three-story houses, 2-story Victorian rowhouses with typical projecting bays, and small vernacular frame houses. Historic Shiloh Baptist Church and its large contemporary addition dominate the side of the street across from the site. A scattering of small parking lots and non-contributing buildings are interspersed among the historic buildings, one adjoining the site to the north. The Board approved the new construction at 1901 9th Street NW in June 2008.

Proposal

The applicant proposes a new brick veneer residential building four stories tall with a height of 45 feet measured from grade to the front roof ridge. It is pulled three feet back from the front property line. The façade is organized in a tri-partite fashion. The first floor has the main entrance paired with a flush mounted aluminum storefront under a band of precast trim that spans the entire façade. The second and third floors

feature a glass and aluminum oriel projection approximately 8 feet wide and 3 feet deep. At the top story the oriel insects with, and continues through, a canted roof slab that gives the effect of a mansard roof form.

The roof plan indicates a roof deck above the fourth floor mansard with a penthouse stair engaged with the north party wall, but these features are not shown in elevation or the perspective rendering.

Evaluation

By utilizing an uncommon, yet traditionally-inspired composition, the design achieves a substantially compatible concept design appropriate for the Shaw Historic District. The unusual narrowness of the site puts this project in an odd category. The building code, in the section for encroachments into public space, stipulates that a building under 16 feet wide cannot have a bay window, show window or oriel projecting into public space¹. The building code goes on to provide formulas for calculating projection widths for buildings over 16 feet wide that results in projections limited to roughly half the width of the front façade. These public space regulations have been in effect dating back to the 1890s and the implementation of the Parking Act and are in no small part a reason for the shapes and sizes of Washington's ubiquitous Victorian rowhouse found throughout our historic districts.

Historically, builders and architects managed to follow this public space regulation, and build projections on houses otherwise too narrow for them, by setting the face of houses far enough back from the property line that the projecting bay sat entirely on private land. An example of this approach can be found just up the block on the row of six buildings at 1539-1549 9th Street NW. The row is a symmetrically composed ensemble, with each house just shy of 16 feet wide. The shallow projections on this row are made possible because the buildings are setback almost five feet from the property line, thus keeping the projections from encroaching onto public space.

The oriel designed for 1505 9th Street is the focal point of a narrow façade that compatibly fits into the existing street scape. The oriel regulates the scale of the building and avoids otherwise over-crowding it with too many smaller or disproportionate windows. To accommodate the oriel, the main façade is setback from the property line three feet and this raises the question whether the building is sufficiently consistent with the pattern of setback found on this street. The Board's guideline, *New Construction in Historic Districts*, recommends that, "a new building should respect the setbacks established by the buildings on a street. In streets with contiguous front facades, such as rowhouse or commercial blocks, it is very important that the façade of a new building align with the façade of its neighbors." An alternative to setting back the building three feet to accommodate the oriel would be to convert the oriel to a flush window system and bring the whole building forward to the property line. Also, the Board could support the applicant if he should seek a building code waiver from the prohibition against public space projections on buildings of this width so that the building could align precisely with its neighbors and still include the oriel.

The height of the building at the fourth floor is moderated by using the sloped roof and in this way does not over shadow the historic building to the south. As the designer has begun to explore construction details, a version with a lower pitched roof was explored and shared with staff. This gave a profile more like a side-gable roof than a mansard and was out of place for a building of this scale and location. Final material selection for the sloped roof will be important in order to give the roof the hefty finish essential to the traditional mansard's role as a robust cap to a building. The mansard roof should avoid giving the opposite, or a flimsy, appearance. Also, roof plans show that a deck can be anticipated, but this feature has not yet been evaluated for visibility along 9th Street. Visibility is a concern because of the lower height of the buildings and open spaces to the north of 1505 9th. As the design continues to be developed, the roof should

¹ DCMR12, Section 3202.10.3.1.a, Section 3202.10.4.1, and Section 3202.10.4.2.

maintain a steep enough pitch to act as a mansard and the roof deck should be located and accessed such that it is not visible from 9th Street.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the concept design for a four-story building with oriel and mansard at 1505 9th Street NW compatible with the character of the Shaw Historic District and consistent with the purposes of the preservation act, and delegate final approval to staff.